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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [MOPPS](#) [MARR](#) [ECON](#) [SENV](#) [EI](#)
SUBJECT: SCENE-SETTER FOR THE APRIL 19-20 VISIT OF EUR PDAS
KURT VOLKER

¶1. (SBU) Embassy Dublin eagerly anticipates your visit and the opportunity to join your discussions with ranking Irish Government officials and others on the full range of bilateral and U.S.-EU issues. Your visit comes at an historic moment in U.S.-Irish relations, with the scheduled restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive on May 8. Support for the Northern peace process has perennially been Embassy Dublin's highest priority, and we have worked closely with the Irish Government and our colleagues in Belfast, London, and Washington on the steps leading from last October's St. Andrews negotiations to the March 26 power-sharing agreement between Sinn Fein and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). After May 8, the Irish Government aims to support the North's transition from the peace process to governance through all-island economic linkages and revival of the North-South bodies established under the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. Opportunities for cross-border cooperation dominated Prime Minister (Taoiseach, "TEE-shuck") Bertie Ahern's April 4 meeting with DUP leader Ian Paisley in Dublin and will also feature in your discussion with Michael Collins, Ahern's chief foreign policy advisor and the future Irish Ambassador to the United States.

The Domestic Political Backdrop

¶2. (SBU) Your visit will also take place against the political backdrop of Ireland's national elections, for which a date has not been set, but which are expected to be held in May/June. Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, who is seeking a third consecutive five-year term, and his party, Fianna Fail ("FEE-na FOYLE"), are campaigning on the strength of Ireland's "Celtic Tiger" economic success. Opposition parties have narrowed the polling gap in recent weeks by focusing their pre-election conventions on health care problems, inflation, and deficient public infrastructure. In terms of immediate U.S. interests in the elections, it is unlikely that the current government or an opposition coalition would revoke the policy allowing U.S. military transits at Shannon Airport (see para 4B). Irish politicians, however, are increasingly vocal about the situation of 20,000-50,000 undocumented Irish residents in the United States, and they continue to confer with Congress and Irish-American groups on legislative options to regularize the status of these "illegals."

Ireland and Climate Change

¶3. (SBU) Your speech on climate change at the Institute of European Affairs will be timely, coming on the heels of two key Irish Government environmental documents released this spring: the White Paper on Energy and the National Climate Change Strategy. The White Paper, published in March, set forth the goals of creating an all-island electricity market

and ensuring that one-third of electricity consumed in the economy would come from renewable energy sources by 2020. The National Climate Strategy, unveiled on April 3, outlined the Government's target of reducing Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions by 17 million tons between 2008 and 2012, with 20 percent of these reductions to derive from carbon credits trading. While Ireland, like the United States, has de-linked emissions growth from economic growth, emissions have increased to 25 percent above 1990 levels, as compared to the country's Kyoto commitment to cut emissions to 13 percent above the 1990 threshold by 2012. In this context, the Government has welcomed Embassy proposals for bilateral cooperation on initiatives focusing on ocean/wave power, clean coal technology, and the capture of methane from agricultural waste for energy uses. In fact, the Embassy sought, and obtained, reference in the National Climate Strategy to opportunities for Irish-U.S. environmental cooperation.

Discussion Topics with the DFA

14. (SBU) After your IEA speech, you will meet with Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Political Director Rory Montgomery, who has suggested the topics below for discussion. DFA Deputy Political Director and International Security Policy Chief, Colm O Floinn (O'Flynn), will attend the Shannon portion of the meeting.

A) The EU. Ireland is an upstanding member of the EU, but, as a smaller country, seldom takes the lead on EU policies, preferring to achieve, and stand behind, consensus among the 27 Member States. The Government supports EU enlargement and welcomed the addition of Romania and Bulgaria earlier this

year. Unlike nationals of the ten accession states in 2004, however, Romanians and Bulgarians face limits on entry into Ireland. Government interlocutors have suggested the possibility of a referendum before year's end on the EU Constitutional Treaty, particularly if France does likewise. Ireland helped to negotiate the Constitution during its EU presidency in 2004 and feels proprietary about the document. During and since its EU presidency, Ireland has worked to strengthen U.S.-EU ties in overcoming earlier Iraq-related tensions, and the Irish take pride in having former Taoiseach John Bruton as the EU Ambassador to the United States.

B) Shannon/Bilateral Military Cooperation. Shannon Airport is a key transit point for U.S. troops and materiel bound for Iraq and other military theaters. In 2006, roughly 280,000 troops passed through Irish airports, and about 5,000 military and charter flights overflew Ireland. The Government supports these revenue-generating transits, even though segments of the Irish public oppose USG policies in Iraq and the Middle East and suspect that the airport hosts extraordinary rendition flights. Public and parliamentary opposition came to the fore with the publication of the European Parliament Special Committee report in early 2007 alleging that 147 rendition-related flights had transited Irish airports, an allegation that the Government dismisses. Privately, the DFA has asked for maximum USG vigilance against incidents that could stoke public sensitivities, such as the publicized transit of a convicted, handcuffed Marine prisoner through Shannon in 2006.

C) Kosovo/Western Balkans. Ireland strongly supports UN Special Envoy Ahtisaari's proposals for Kosovo's supervised independence. The Irish Government also favors the integration of the western Balkans into the EU and trans-Atlantic community, pending necessary political reforms in the region and, particularly in Serbia's case, greater cooperation with ICTY. In August, Ireland will become the "Framework Nation" in a KFOR division in Kosovo that will include 270 Irish troops, and the Government therefore feels vested in diplomatic approaches to the region's problems.

D) Russia. Irish-Russian relations are a question mark, and

your discussions with Political Director Montgomery will be an opportunity for the Embassy to garner information on this point. Taoiseach Bertie Ahern apparently has a personal interest in Russia, and he reportedly volunteered to make the presentation on EU-Russian relations when President Bush met with EU leaders in Brussels in February 2005. Ireland has no dependence on Russian oil or gas and relies instead on North Sea and UK sources for 90 percent of its energy needs.

15. (SBU) Following the discussion with Montgomery, you will participate in a DFA-hosted roundtable on a range of other issues, for which the DFA has selected interlocutors both in-house and from other Government agencies. A participant from the Department of the Environment is expected to address Government views on climate change. The other agenda items are as follows:

A) Counterterrorism. Ireland, which lost six citizens in the 9/11 attacks and many more in spillover terrorist actions during the Northern Ireland Troubles, is supportive of U.S. counterterrorism efforts. In 2005, the Irish Parliament (the Dail, "DOYLE") enacted the Criminal Justice (Terrorism Offenses) Bill, which enabled Ireland to sign onto all 12 UN Conventions on Terrorism and to strengthen powers for asset seizures and EU-approved financial sanctions on suspected terrorists and financiers. The Irish Data Protection Commissioner, however, criticized USG actions on SWIFT, and other Government agencies have not provided interlocutors to engage seriously with the Embassy on the issue (a possible indication that these agencies disagree with, but do not wish to refute officially, the Commissioner's views.) Moreover, the Government has called for the closure of Guantanamo as inconsistent with basic human rights.

B) UN/Peacekeeping. The Irish Government sees the UN as a cornerstone of its foreign policy, and, in 2005, Foreign Minister Dermot Ahern (no relation to the Taoiseach) served as then-UNSG Kofi Annan's Special Envoy to Europe for UN Reform. Ireland is also a longstanding contributor to UN peacekeeping missions, with roughly 800 troops now stationed with nine UN missions, including a 300-soldier contingent that will finish a UNIMIL tour in Liberia this summer. This contingent will become available for possible future UN peacekeeping missions in Africa or for service in a Nordic-led division of the EU Battle Group rapid reaction force, which Ireland has committed to join in 2008. As a NATO Partnership for Peace member, Ireland has seven military personnel in Afghanistan, performing administrative roles

and, soon, ordnance training.

C) The Middle East/Iraq. Ireland, which has longstanding sympathies for the Palestinian cause, has welcomed the formation of a Palestinian National Unity Government (NUG) and supports EU overtures to the NUG to accept the Quartet Principles. Regarding Lebanon, Ireland joined the original UNIFIL force in the 1970s and contributed 150 troops to the bolstered UNIFIL mission last summer in the aftermath of the Israeli-Hizbollah conflict. In Iraq, the Government actively supports the EU police training mission and, since January, has pledged over euro five million in humanitarian assistance. The Government also backs U.S. efforts to end sectarian violence, but tends to avoid public discussion of Iraqi issues, given public sensitivities and media criticism tied to U.S. military transits at Shannon. DFA counterparts have expressed concern about the harmful impact of U.S. frustrations in Iraq on U.S. global leadership.

D) Overseas Development Assistance (ODA). For 2007, the Government budgeted euro 800 million for ODA, and the Irish public strongly supports the goal of increasing ODA to 0.7 percent of GNP by 2012. Irish Aid, the foreign assistance arm of the DFA, manages most of its programs in sub-Saharan Africa, a focus region for Irish humanitarian efforts since the missionary era. Foreign Minister Ahern has indicated to the Embassy that he would like to pursue a higher-profile, perhaps international diplomatic role, and he may have his sights on African conflict areas, particularly Darfur, which

he visited last July.

The Ambassador's Dinner

16. (SBU) For the dinner that the Ambassador plans to hold in your honor, we have invited guests who could offer insights on all things European and on bilateral ties. We hope to see EU Member State ambassadors, Irish Members of the European Parliament, academics/think tankers, Government officials, clerics, environmental experts, and media representatives. We have also reached out to Irish officials in the EU Commission, but work schedules may make their attendance unfeasible.

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